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Hamlet and the People "Who Know Things"

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Is Shakespeare universal? Is Hamlet a "strong" text that generates the same interpretation across cultural space and time, or is it a malleable text whose meaning is contingent upon variables in the encounter between text and reader and the contexts of reading? These were the kinds of questions that my students and I addressed in several courses I taught on Shakespeare over the past four years. As one might expect, our answers differed. Here, I develop and refine the argument I made and, sometimes, made incoherently: universality, whether in a writer, a text, or in criticism "is neither natural nor self-evident." Because part of my reason for turning to Shakespeare was my dissatisfaction with contrapuntal reading as a pedagogical strategy for cultivating a "critical understanding of imperialism" in students, I conclude that we can only achieve that goal if we deploy contrapuntal reading across the literary curriculum.

Keywords: universal, Tiv, Shakespeare, interpretation, contrapuntal reading

Shakespeare and the Bible may have little in common, but what they do have, a "global and multicultural" universalism, only they possess. Author of a "secular scripture," Shakespeare invented a memorable cast of human characters, two (Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark, and Falstaff) of whom are incomparable. Both exceed and transform "life," but one (Hamlet) vies with King David and Jesus for the status of champion charismatic. If *Hamlet* is "theater of the world," it is because Hamlet's consciousness spills over and transcends its vessel, the "revenge tragedy." Indeed, he is a prime incarnation of that "universal" essence of the human that Samuel Johnson announced centuries ago.[1] It has been more than two decades since readers encountered these claims, first in Harold Bloom's *Shakespeare*: *The Invention of the Human* (1998) and, later, in *How to Read and Why*.[2] If, now, I paraphrase them, it is because I wish to point out that well before academic skeptics began casting doubt on the proposition that Shakespeare is universal, non-academic scholars had already done so. That these scholars, or, in Tiv, witches and the people "who know things," did so to dispel any impression her kinsmen might have that she had been "sitting in the bush" rather than being enlightened by "those who know things" is just part of the story that Laura Bohannan tells in "Shakespeare in the Bush." More important than that is the fact that the "wisdom" that

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1 Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998), 2–3, 383–84.

2 Harold Bloom, *How to Read and Why* (New York: Touchstone, 2000), 201.

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those "who know things" sought to impart—that "people are the same everywhere; therefore, there are always witches and it is we, the elders, who know how witches work"—did so in the name of an aestheticism that is the uncanny double of that on the basis of which Bloom designates Shakespeare's a "global and multicultural" universalism (9). That this should give readers of Shakespeare considerable pause is my theme.

"Shakespeare in the Bush" chronicles a literary experiment that Laura Bohannan carried out in colonial Nigeria in the early 1950s or shortly before. She had gone from Oxford to Tiv land, then a region largely inhabited by agrarian communities,[3] to study Tiv "ceremonies." Before her departure, however, she had disputed the provenance of Shakespeare's universality with a friend. He had claimed that Shakespeare's universality derives from his Englishness; she, that it derives from Shakespeare's humanity. Because she thought that "human nature" is undifferentiable, she had counterposed her *humanism* to his *particularism* and concluded that Shakespeare must mean to all what it means to one. Or, to be more exact, that *Hamlet*, a copy of which he had given her to read as a literary prophylaxis against mental degeneration in the tropics, "had only one possible interpretation, and that one universally obvious." Upon arrival, she took up residence in a relatively isolated Tiv community over which "a very knowledgeable" patriarch presided. She had hoped that, in a three-month hiatus between harvest and the new farming season (roughly January through March) when, unable to work, her hosts would have to occupy themselves with leisurely activities, she would be able to study their ceremonies. That hope was dashed by rising swamps, a circumstance that changed the course of events. Unknown to her, her Tiv hosts' ceremonies required the participation of elders of adjoining communities. Because these elders could not readily make their way through the swamps, those ceremonies had to be cancelled. Rather than stay idle, her hosts substituted beer drinking and storytelling parties. Initially, Bohannan had turned to reading *Hamlet*. But when she realized that, by thus isolating herself she risked being perceived as an antisocial bookworm, she seized the opportunity that the unplanned revels offered her to verify her hypothesis and, thus, to refute her English friend's.

Initially, Bohannan had thought it would be simple. Indeed, she had expected that Tiv readers would readily understand *Hamlet* because, like all "greater tragedies," its "general plot and motivation would always be clear." In addition, with explanations of unfamiliar "details of custom" and slight modifications to English words and phrases, she would make the text intelligible. In her laboratory, however, these expectations failed. Being neither literate nor competent in English, her Tiv hosts could not read the play. Therefore, she had to translate it into Tiv, transform it into a folktale, and perform it as a story. In addition, she had to execute these tasks simultaneously. Danish "customs" (for example, monogamy, particularly as practiced by Danish royalty) resisted explanation, and English terms proved intransigent. At the end of "Shakespeare in the Bush," Bohannan had suffered multiple setbacks. Her translation and adaptation of *Hamlet* had facilitated the displacement of Danish Christian and pre-Christian iconography, cultural

3 For studies of the Tiv, see the following: Paul Bohannan and Laura Bohannan, >*Tiv Economy* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968); Emmanuel Chiahemba Ayangaôr, *The Tiv and Their Southern Neighbours, 1890-1990* (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2011); and Iyorwuese Hagher, *Beyond Hate and Violence: Understanding the Tiv Struggle for Citizenship Rights and Social Justice in Nigeria* (Ibadan: Caltop Publications, 2002).

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values, beliefs, institutions, and practices by their Tiv approximates. Dissatisfied with her performance, the Tiv elders had not only declared her knowledge of Hamlet's story wanting but had also advised her to restrict herself, in the future, to procuring correct versions of *Hamlet* and other narratives of her "people" from "the elders" in her community so that they, the people "who know things," "would instruct" her "in their true meaning." In the encounter between her Anglo-American universalism and her hosts', Bohannan lost *Hamlet* to her Tiv hosts. How did this happen? What might understanding how it happened disclose about universalisms of the kind that inspired Bohannan's experiment? Are all such universalisms (Bohannan's, her hosts, Bloom's) identical, similar, or different? If different, how? How do they define the universal? What do they assume about readers, reading, and universality, and what do those assumptions imply about the reading of Shakespeare? What are we to make of the reading practices that these assumptions facilitate? Should we consider them as method, ideology, or desire, or should we consider them all of these? What fate awaits writers (Shakespeare) and works (*Hamlet*) we designate and read as universal?

I could not possibly answer all of these questions here, nor do I intend to do so. And of those that I do answer, I do not promise that I will do so methodically because that requires that I be more expansive than space allows. What I attempt to answer is this question: What does "Shakespeare in the Bush" reveal about *reading* (Shakespeare) as a universal writer and *Hamlet* as a work whose meaning is uniform across time and space? In answering this question, I focus on adaptation and translation, two strategies by which Bohannan attempts to make *Hamlet* accessible to her Tiv hosts. I also examine negotiation as a strategy by which her hosts intervene in her experiment. What analyses of the translation of the English text into Tiv, the adaptation of tragic drama into folktale, and the interventions by Tiv interlocutors, disclose, I argue, is that regardless of how we conceive of it, universality may be as much, if not more, a matter of critical ambition as of literary excellence. As Bohannan discovered, to demonstrate that *Hamlet* meant to her hosts what it meant to her, she had to do more than translate and adapt the play. She had to negotiate the meaning of key concepts, institutions, practices, and values with her Tiv hosts. That, in the course of these negotiations, she lost *Hamlet*, was advised to seek its meaning from the people "who know things" ("the elders" on whom age had conferred the competence necessary for correctly interpreting the play), and abandoned her project is testimony to how readily abstract propositions about literary meaning and value could unravel when they come up against brute facts.

Language was one of those brute facts that Bohannan had not expected to negotiate with her hosts. So was genre. Both would prove decisive for the outcome of Bohannan's project. Translating *Hamlet* into Tiv proved less simple than she anticipated. Repeatedly, she ran into difficulty finding a Tiv word whose meaning corresponded with an English original. Consider the following statements, all translations into English of paraphrases of Hamlet that she must have delivered in Tiv:

1. "It was Hamlet's dead father. It was a thing we call a 'ghost.' I had to use the English word . . ."

2. "Hamlet was courting his Daughter, but her father and her brother . . . [I cast hastily for some tribal analogy] warned her not to let Hamlet visit her when she was alone on her farm."

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3."He behaved so oddly he frightened her. Indeed—I was fumbling for words to express the dubious quality of Hamlet's madness"

4."The great chief wanted to know what was wrong with Hamlet, so he sent for two of Hamlet's age mates [school friends would have taken a long explanation] to talk to Hamlet . . ."

5."It was impossible to say anything, in that language, about devil-inspired visions"

6."I rushed in to save Polonius's reputation. 'Polonius did speak. Hamlet heard him. But he thought it was the chief and wished to kill him to avenge his father. He had meant to kill him earlier that evening . . .' I broke down, unable to describe to these pagans, who had no belief in individual afterlife, the difference between dying at one's prayers and dying 'unhousell'd, disappointed, unaneled'"

In each statement, Bohannan first presents a plot element in her story in direct discourse: "It was . . ."; "Hamlet was, . . ." and so on. Then, in reported discourse, she parenthetically recalls a word she could not readily translate: "I had to use the English word"; ". . . but her father and her brother . . . [I cast hastily for some tribal analogy] warned her not to let Hamlet visit her when she was alone on her farm." Words or terms such as *school friends* and *scholar* resist translation, but their resistance is partially overcome by substituting culturally specific approximations. Thus, "age mates" for "school friends" and a "witch" or "a man who knew things" for "scholar." In both cases, something (specificity) is "lost in translation," but something (domestication) is also gained. "Shakespeare in the Bush" suggests that such loss could be a desideratum for domesticating literary works in the alien languages and cultures.

But what scuttled Bohannan's experiment were not English words for which she could find near, if not exact, equivalents in Tiv. It was untranslatable "details" of Tiv "custom" that, like "speed bumps,"[4] confounded her. These include social values, institutions, and practices (marriage, filial relationships and obligations, reverence for one's elders, rituals of mourning, the order of inheritance, crime and the principles of justice, and the like) for which Bohannan had failed to find their semantic equivalents in Tiv. That Horatio refers the appearance of his father's ghost to Hamlet rather than to King Claudius is, for that reason, incomprehensible to the Tiv: "good could not come of going behind a chief's back; clearly Horatio was not a man who knew things," they concluded. In her hosts' mythology, death terminates life, and the dead cannot assume human form, return to the human world, and communicate with the living. Consequently, they did not only dispute her claim that the visitation Hamlet received was his deceased father, King Hamlet, but also insisted that it was an "omen," which, therefore, could neither walk nor speak. They could neither grasp why Hamlet objects to his mother's union with his "incestuous, . . . adulterate" uncle (1.4.42) nor understand how it could possibly warrant his screed against her (3.4.37–92). On the contrary, they were as deeply scandalized by his response as they were by his desire for retribution: "For a man to raise his hand against his father's brother and the one who has become his father—that is a terrible thing." Fratricide, parricide, regicide: these are all unethical and taboo, and

4 Emily Apter, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (London and New York: 2013), 3.

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not just because they are evil but, rather, because they threaten their gerontocratic patriarchy. Though they denied the existence of ghosts, Bohannan's hosts were still scandalized by the fact that he doubts the veracity of his diseased father's account of his murder. Apparently, even if the Ghost is not Hamlet's dead father, Hamlet could not violate ethical norms that prohibit accusing one's father of lying. Thus, Hamlet's attempt to confirm his father's story by watching King Claudius's reaction to *The Mousetrap* (3.2.226–31) is unethical.

Perhaps the most significant untranslatable Bohannan had to negotiate with her hosts was "the Ghost." In *Shakespeare*, Bloom argues that "Everything" in *Hamlet* "depends upon Hamlet's response to the Ghost . . . The question of *Hamlet* always must be Hamlet himself."[5] This statement places the Ghost at the very core of any interpretation of *Hamlet*. If one comes to *Hamlet* already imbued with the belief that the aristocratic figure to which the Prince responds is a ghost, then one would have no problem with this argument. But what if one believes, as Bohannan's hosts did, that it is "an omen sent by a witch"? Then one finds one's self in exactly the position Bohannan found herself. In telling the story of Hamlet, she had used the English word *ghost*, because she could find no Tiv substitute. Her hosts, however, rejected it because that concept did not exist in Tiv mythology. Lacking both concept and word, they would not accept the possibility that any other people could. If Hamlet's response to the Ghost is decisive for our understanding of *Hamlet*, that is only because we take the existence of ghosts for granted as, clearly, Bloom does. Confident in the knowledge that it exists, he perceives the Ghost and Prince Hamlet as symbolic figures whose encounter is comparable to a meeting of "the Archaic Age" and "the High Renaissance."[6] Indeed, it is by tracing their genealogy from ancient Norse mythology through the *Ur-Hamlet* to Shakespeare's life history and creative imagination that he reaches the conclusion that neither Hamlet nor Shakespeare is "real"; both are "*a reflecting pool, a spacious mirror in which we needs must see ourselves.*"[7] By contrast, reading *Hamlet* through the prism of Tiv mythology, Bohannan's hosts insist that what the sentinels see, and what Hamlet communes with, is an "omen sent by a witch" to assault them. Wherever one encounters translation at its limits, as one does in untranslatables, one wonders if Bloom's "multicultural" universality, like the monocultural variety of Bohannan and her hosts, might not be underestimating the degree to which reading, all reading, relies on "primitive threshold notions"[8] about language, text, reading and the reader, and interpretation.

In addition to the failure of translation, Bohannan also had to grapple with a literary problem: how to inscribe the subject of a hybrid, ethnographic, and autobiographical text.? Consider the following passage, which chronicles her arrival in West Africa:

> It was my second field trip to that African tribe, and I thought myself ready to live in one of its remote sections. I eventually settled on the hillock of a very knowledgeable old man . . . Like the other elders of the vicinity, the old man spent most of his time performing

5 Bloom, *Shakespeare*, 387.
6 Bloom, *Shakespeare*, 387.
7 Bloom, *Shakespeare*, 401; italics added.
8 Edward W. Said, "Criticism between Culture and System," in *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983), 180.

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> ceremonies seldom seen these days . . . I was delighted . . . Then, I thought, they would have even more time to perform ceremonies and explain them to me.

This passage discloses a split in the subject of "Shakespeare in the Bush." "I" designates both subject of ethnographic fieldwork (the "I" who travels, secures a residence, and observes people) and of autobiographical discourse (the "I" who recalls the actions of the former and comments retrospectively on them. Because they are conflated in that first-person speaker, however, they seem to refer to a unitary subject. A similar discursive effect is generated by the six statements that we cited earlier. Repeatedly, shifts from direct discourse ("I had to use"; "I broke down") to indirect discourse ("Polonius did speak. Hamlet heard him") elide the distinction between subject and object, investigator and storyteller. It is as if the figure who translates and adapts *Hamlet* while observing its reception were indistinguishable from the figure whose storytelling performance the Tiv simultaneously appraise, or a unitary, coherent, and organic consciousness were, simultaneously, the subject and object of her own ethnographic inquiry. If this figure reminds us of anything, it is the universal or "supra-historical" subject of European Enlightenment philosophy, which, by opposing itself (reason) against the barbarian (confinement in tradition, instinct, and culture), fashions for itself an Archimedean vantage point or perspective from which it could scrutinize, define, classify, analyze, describe, explain, and interpret its objects—"woman," "non-Europeans and the labouring classes."[9]

So, what has "Shakespeare in the Bush" disclosed about *reading* (Shakespeare) and *Hamlet as* transcendental writer and writing? Certainly not what Bohannan set out to prove nor, for that matter, what Bloom asserts so categorically about *Hamlet.* Assertions of Shakespeare universality are hardly new. For many decades, he enjoyed pride of place in the canon of English studies for exactly that reason. He still does, and deservedly so, Tolstoy's reservations about his works (the Russian reportedly found them tedious and repulsive) notwithstanding.[10] But it is also worth recalling the fact that it was colonial ideology, not the self-evident universality of his works, that propelled Shakespeare into the very core of English literary curricula.[11] So, to minds nurtured on a diet of Shakespeare in the colonies and, in the postcolonies, to a diet consisting of Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, Eliot, *and* assorted national writers, such assertions are likely to coexist with that skepticism toward all grand theory that later became the hallmark of post-structuralist thought. Still, because Shakespeare's universality is very rarely described as "multicultural," some of these minds may be startled. If by "multicultural" one simply means that *Hamlet* is read, rehearsed, cited, and performed across the world, then more

9 Stefan Jonsson, "The Ideology of Universalism: Or, One Good Reason to Celebrate Lenin," *Confronting Universalities*, eds. Mads Anders Baggesgaard and Jakob Ladegaard (Aarhus and Copenhagen: Aarhus University Press, 2011), 111–12; Daniel Bell, "Communitarianism," *in The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, summer 2016 edition, ed. Edward N. Zalta, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/communitarianism/.

10 Michael LaPointe, "The Meaning of Bones: Does Shakespeare Really Have 'Universal' Appeal?" *The Paris Review* (2016): 3–4.

11 Simon Gikandi, "African Literature and the Colonial Factor," *The Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature*, eds. Abiola Irele and Simon Gikandi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 387.

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than a century of stage performance, of instruction in English studies, of literary history[12] and literary anthologies, and of archives, both electronic—for example, the MIT Global Shakespeares Video & Performance Archive website[13]—and non-electronic should persuade us that it is. If, on the other hand, it means that the meaning of *Hamlet* is always uniform, or that Shakespeare's universality is an effect of the incomparable aesthetic by which he, more than all other agents but God, invented human "personality,"[14] then surely not. We can understand the dissemination of Shakespeare and the status of his works as global cultural capital only if we attend to modern geopolitical, cultural, and literary history.

In *Shakespeare*, Bloom outlines a two-step strategy for reading Shakespeare: immerse yourself in, say, *Hamlet* and the speech of the Prince, his father the Ghost, Queen Gertrude; then, let them lead you "outward" to "contexts" that seem relevant, we are told, "sensible, even 'natural.'"[15] To validate this reading protocol, he invokes the venerable critical lineage inaugurated by Johnson. But because it is as much an *argumentum ad verecundiam* as the statement "'That is the way it is done, so that is how we do it,'" with which Bohannan's hosts repeatedly fob off her questions, it is hardly effective as a reason for adopting his, rather than the Tiv, reading strategy. If the reading protocol Bloom outlines and the Tiv employ suggest anything, it is that it does matter *who* is reading *Hamlet*. It is because Bohannan effaced herself as reader because she assumed the position of the "supra-historical" subject, that she could not resist her host's own self-effacement.

Contrary to its proponents, universality in a writer (Shakespeare, Naguib Mahfouz, or Emily Dickinson), in a text (the Bible, the Koran, *The Brothers Karamazov*), or in a critic's (Bloom's) interpretation of a text is neither natural nor self-evident. Probe such claims to universality, and sooner rather than later you will arrive at a conclusion that Michael LaPointe reaches in "The Meaning of the Bones" (2016). "If having a universal quality means simply sustaining a popular presence in various countries, through various periods," LaPointe writes in his delightful review of *Shakespeare in Swahililand*, "then a great many authors meet the definition. But if a universal poet is meant to be like water—something truly no one can do without—then it's an impossible standard" (3). This last remark equally applies to the Bible and all sacred texts on whose behalf readers claim universality. "Shakespeare in the Bush" and *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* subscribe to these two senses of Shakespeare's universality. It was because she thought that the "general plot and motivation" of *Hamlet* "would always be clear—everywhere," that Bohannan was persuaded that its interpretation would be uniform. It is because he believes that "Only the Bible has a circumference that is everywhere, like Shakespeare's" that Bloom declares the latter's plays "secular scripture."[16] This similarity notwithstanding, we must note that Bohannan and Bloom's attitudes toward the universalism of Shakespeare differ. Pervasive at the beginning of "Shakespeare in the Bush," the notion of the universal as that which is indispensable and life-sustaining is

12 Gikandi, "African Literature and the Colonial Factor," 379–97.
13 See http://globalshakespeares.mit.edu/about/.
14 Bloom, *Shakespeare*, 3–4.
15 Bloom, *Shakespeare*, 8–9.
16 Bloom, *Shakespeare*, 3.

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abandoned toward the end. By contrast, *Shakespeare* insistently holds onto both. In the end, it is in the difficult and, ultimately, futile negotiations that she undertook as she valiantly attempted to prove that the meaning of *Hamlet* is eternal that we discern how Bohannan corroborates LaPointe's conclusion. What those negotiations suggest is that, although they do enrich human self-understanding immeasurably, neither the Bible nor Shakespeare could be to human self-knowledge what air and water are to human life. *No writer or text* could possibly be. But political history, economic changes, and cultural institutions and dialogue could so reproduce and disseminate any writer or texts that they become invaluable to us as agents in the process by which we acquire knowledge necessary for self-understanding and self-transformation across territorial, linguistic, cultural, and social borders.

This, I believe, is the insight that John Kani shared with Gregory Doran when, in an interview, he declared that *Julius Caesar* is "Shakespeare's *African* play" (italics added). What makes *Julius Caesar* "African"? The answer is to be found in its thematic, aesthetic, and historical resonance *for* Africans. In the political crisis that rips Rome's founding republic apart, and in the "pagan" world in which that crisis unfolds, Africans such as Nelson Mandela and Julius Nyerere found drama that gives voice to the existential crises into which their transition from the status of politically self-governing, economically self-reliant, and culturally autonomous peoples to that of subject peoples has plunged Africans. This insight, which we must distinguish from the insight that inspired "African Tales of Shakespeare" namely, that as pariahs Shakespeare's "Africans" (Othello, Shylock, and Lear) offer contemporary Europeans a cautionary tale about "the perils "of hatred and exclusion,"[17] is what I wanted to share with my students when, in 2016, I decided to teach a course on Shakespeare. This was not, however, how I understood and phrased my motive at the time. At the time, my motives were personal and professional. Having taught courses in the margins of the English studies curriculum for more than two decades, I had grown skeptical about the effectiveness of "contrapuntal reading" for a decolonial literary pedagogy. I derived considerable satisfaction from delivering my courses, and did so from some more than from others. But, over time, I had begun to wonder if inviting students to read *Jane Eyre* alongside *Wide Sargasso Sea* or *The Tempest* alongside *Prospero's Daughter* necessarily inspires in them a critical understanding of the processes of "imperialism and . . . resistance to it."[18] To be sure, contrapuntal reading was occasionally effective. However, it also seemed to prompt some to retreat into moral pieties about oppression and exploitation or into a resentful silence.

Outside the classroom, I found myself wondering about my own reading experiences. As a young man, I had been pleasantly seduced by reading. In addition to the pleasure they gave me, tales of adventure, detective novels, popular romance, the Hardy Boys, Charles Dickens, Drum Magazine, Lagos Weekend, Onitsha Market Literature, Shakespeare, Ayi Kwei Armah, and others also provided me refuge from crises I could neither understand nor resolve. Thus, they inspired in me a love of literature that a career

17 Krzysztof Warlikowski, "African Tales by Shakespeare," MIT Global Shakespeares Video & Performance Archive, https://globalshakespeares.mit.edu/african-tales-by-shakespeare-warlikowski-krzysztof-2011/#video=african-tales-by-shakespeare-trailer.

18 Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 66.

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in literary studies has both sustained and dimmed. So when, in 2016, I lit on the idea of teaching a course on *reading* Shakespeare, I thought of it as an experimental way of addressing what I considered a pressing problem in decolonial pedagogy while, simultaneously, satisfying my craving for the satisfactions that Shakespeare had provided me many years ago. Three years and three courses—ENG336H1, on *how* and *why* we read Shakespeare; ENG373H1, on issues in Shakespeare's afterlives; and ENG435H1, on the reception of Shakespeare outside of the West—later, I have concluded that, whatever its defects may be, contrapuntal reading can succeed. To do so, however, we must unshackle it from the margins of literary pedagogy to which it seems tethered and, thereafter, supplement it with a decolonial pedagogy that invites students to consciously reflect on their reading practices and question the "truths" that circumscribe their interpretations. Reading Bohannan's experiment against Bloom's monograph suggests how effective such a pedagogy could be.

In saying this, I do not mean to suggest that supplementing contrapuntal criticism with a decolonial pedagogy would inoculate students against interpretive dogma. Indeed, it could, but it also could not. Or, as the reactions to the aforementioned courses, which are offered to specialists and majors in the undergraduate English program at the University of Toronto show, the results could be decidedly mixed. Recalling how ENG336H1 affected them, some said it altered their understanding of the interpretive process in general, prompted them to question the language with which they "describe the world," and heightened their consciousness of the impact of a reader's assumptions and expectations upon his or her interpretation of Shakespeare. Similarly, some recalled that ENG435H exposed them to the perspectives of communities represented in colonial texts and, thus, made them aware of paradoxes in Shakespearean drama they had not discerned in prior readings. But while for some it is our readings of his comedies and tragedies alongside Asian and African adaptations in ENG373H1 that endowed "global relevance" on Shakespeare, for others those same readings confirmed Shakespeare's claim to being universal. That the latter reaction is contrary to the argument I have made here suggests that instructing students to read Shakespeare's tragedies and comedies against or alongside postcolonial adaptations could inspire them to question critical orthodoxies, reinforce their assumptions and beliefs about Shakespeare, or help them cultivate the skills necessary for reading Shakespeare against the grain. Now, judging from these reactions, I realize that more needs to be done. Unshackling contrapuntal criticism from the margins of literary pedagogy and supplementing it with a decolonial pedagogy may encourage in students the habit of reading *all* texts critically and self-reflexively, claims to universality made on their behalf notwithstanding.

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